

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ADULTS

Self-Protection for Adults

When a catastrophic event occurs, it has a strong impact on individuals and their community. When there is an ongoing situation like the Coronavirus pandemic or a critical event, people often respond with a great deal of emotion. As a result, it is possible that people will not function at their best during their exposure to the event and afterwards. Here are some suggestions to help us during these times.

Phases that can occur from the time you are exposed to the present:

- *Acute Phase:* You may feel the following during this phase: unimportant, a sense of derealization (feeling your surroundings are not real), not like yourself, numb, confused, space and temporal disorientation. Shock is a normal mechanism allowing us to maintain a certain distance from the event; this can help us absorb the impact and attend to the immediate needs of the situation.
- *Emotional Impact Phase:* This phase includes a variety of emotions such as sadness, guilt, rage, fear, confusion and anxiety. Somatic reactions can also develop, like physical disorders such as headaches, gastrointestinal issues, etc., and difficulties finding a state of calm.
- *Coping Phase:* During this phase, we try to cope by finding a way to understand what happened and using all our resources. We ask questions such as: “*Why did it happen?*” “*What can I do?*” “*Why now?*” etc.

Most common reactions that might occur over the course of several days or weeks:

- *Intrusive Thoughts:* Recurring images; involuntary and intrusive memories (*flashbacks*).
- *Avoidance:* Wanting to avoid related thoughts or feelings; avoiding anything to do with the event/the situation.
- *Depressed Mood and/or Persistent Negative Thoughts:* Negative beliefs and expectations about ourselves or the world such as thinking: “*The world is totally dangerous.*”
- *Self-blame:* Persistent and irrational feelings of guilt about self or others for having caused the traumatic event or its consequences, especially if having had contact with those infected.
- *Guilt:* Feelings of guilt for having survived/not been infected.
- *Negative Emotion:* Persistent negative emotions related to the trauma/threatening situation such as feeling fear, horror, rage, guilt, persistent shame even after the situation is getting better.
- *Sleeping and/or Eating Dysregulation:* Difficulties falling asleep, frequent awakenings and nightmares, or hypersomnia (sleeping for long periods of time). Eating too much or too little.
- *Anhedonia:* Strong loss of interest in pleasant activities.
- *Overwhelm:* Being overwhelmed by daily tasks and having to restructure daily activities; feeling paralyzed.



Note: There are marked individual differences in the appearance, duration and intensity of these reactions.

WHAT WE CAN DO

- Recognize our own emotional reactions and the difficulties that we might have.
- **Do not deny feelings. Remember, it is normal for everyone to have emotional reactions when an unexpected, unforeseeable and threatening event/situation occurs.**
- Monitor our physical and emotional reactions.
- Remember, we are not alone. Even when we are not in contact physically, we are part of a larger system. This organization can support and help us emotionally and psychologically.
- Talk about the critical event/situation to others. This helps us to release emotional tension.
- Respect that others' may have different emotional reactions and action/behaviour that may be difficult to understand from our point of view.
- Keep in touch with others. Establish a new, predictable daily routine during this time.
- Ask for help from people we trust and with whom we feel safe.
- Take some time to recover. It is not necessary to focus on what is happening 24/7. Pay attention to our needs. Distance ourselves from the event/the situation by sleeping, resting, thinking, crying, being with our loved ones, etc.
- Protect our emotional health by accessing support services as needed.
- Obtain psychological support focused on reprocessing traumatic memories and reactions resulting from the event/the situation, as needed.
- Limit access to media to once or twice a day. Often, when a critical incident is occurring, our response is to find meaning through spending a lot of time reading the commentary and watching the news. It is important to protect and limit ourselves from excessive exposure.
- Use official channels as our sources of information, such as the World Health Organisation website: <https://www.who.int/> and follow its guidelines on hygiene practices.
- Remember that a positive attitude and avoiding catastrophic thoughts help us and our community.